

## Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 PORT M 00371 240211Z  
ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DLOS-06 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01  
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02  
SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13 OES-06 OMB-01 TRSE-00 SAL-01  
/082 W

-----240916Z 066949 /10

R 230600Z MAR 77  
FM AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2178  
INFO AMEMBASSY CANBERRA  
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT MORESBY 0371

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: AS PP PLOS PINT PFOR  
SUBJ: TORRES STRAIT BOUNDARY DISPUTE

REF: A) CANBERRA 817, B) PORT MORESBY 145, C) PORT MORESBY 161,  
D) CANBERRA A-25

SUMMARY: WE CONSIDER TORRES STRAIT BOUNDARY DISPUTE TO BE  
POTENTIALLY MOST EXPLOSIVE ISSUE TOUCHING ON AUSTRALIAN-PNG  
RELATIONS SINCE INDEPENDENCE. IF IT IS NOT APPROACHED PROPERLY,  
MUCH OF GOOD WILL PAINSTAKINGLY BUILT UP BY AUSTRALIA OVER  
PAST DECADE CAN BE, AND MOST LIKELY WILL BE, BADLY ERODED.  
ISSUE PROMISES TO BECOME ACTIVE ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AFTER  
SITTING OF NEW PNG PARLIAMENT JULY-AUGUST 1977. BOTH GOVERNMENTS  
DESIRE "MANAGE" ISSUE SO THAT IT WILL NOT BECOME ENMESHED  
IN PNG ELECTION CAMPAIGN. HOWEVER, ACTIVITIES OF CHURCH GROUPS  
AND THE LOBBY FOR ABORIGINES IN AUSTRALIA PUBLICIZING AUSTRALIAN  
CASE COULD UNDERMINE DETERMINATION PNG LEADERS NOT TO  
EXACERBATE SITUATION BY ENGAGING IN PUBLIC DEBATE DURING  
ELECTIONS. WE HAVE DISTINCT IMPRESSION GOA IS SERIOUSLY  
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PAGE 02 PORT M 00371 240211Z

UNDERESTIMATING PNG UNHAPPINESS AND, IN SOME QUARTERS, ANGER  
AND SENSE OF BETRAYAL WITH COURSE TORRES STRAIT TALKS HAVE  
TAKEN. END SUMMARY.

1. PAST: PNG LOS ADVISOR IN DEPT OF JUSTICE GEOFFREY DABB  
INFORMS US PROGRESSION OF TALKS SINCE 1974 APPEARS TO PNG TO  
HAVE BADLY DETERIORATED, UNTIL PRESENTLY A SENSE OF BAD FAITH

ON PART OF AUSTRALIA PREVAILS. EARLIER PNG WAS LEFT WITH IMPRESSION OF HIGH LEVEL OFFICIAL SPOKESMEN OF AUSTRALIAN DEPTS OF ABORIGINES AND FOREIGN AFFAIRS THAT UNINHABITED ISLANDS IN TORRES STRAIT WOULD BE OFFERED TO PNG. THIS WAS NOT GOA OFFICIAL POSITION AND QUEENSLAND HAD YET TO BE CONSULTED, BUT PNG WAS NVERTHELESS LEFT WITH THIS FAVORABLE IMPRESSION.

BY MAY OF 1976

PNG WAS INFORMED THAT AUSTRALIA HAD DECIDED TO KEEP INHABITED ISLANDS NORTH (ON PNG SIDE) OF SEA/SEABED LINE TO BE DRAWN IN FUTURE, AND THAT ISLANDS WOULD HAVE A THREE-MILE TERRITORIAL SEA. BY NOV. GOA CHANGED ITS POSITION AND INFORMED GPNG THAT THIS APPROACH WAS UNACCEPTABLE TO GOA AND THAT EXPLANATIONS WOULD BE MADE BY GOA FORMIN PEACOCK SOON TO VISIT PNG. PRIOR TO PEACOCK'S ARRIVAL IN PNG, HOWEVER, PRIME MINISTER FRASER VISITED TORRES STRAIT WITH GREAT PUBLICITY, AND WHEN PEACOCK VISITED PNG (NOV) HE INDICATED THAT AUSTRALIAN POSITION WAS ALL ISLANDS IN STRAIT (WHETHER INHABITED OR NOT) WOULD REMAIN IN AUSTRALIAN HANDS, HAVE THREE-MILE SEA AND 12-MILE FISHING ZONE. THIS TO GPNG REPRESENTED CONTINUING DETERIORATION OF TERMS AND COVERED A SHABBY PUBLICITY STUNT PRIOR TO TALKS. TALKS WERE SUSPENDED.

2. CURRENT: DABB STATES THAT ISSUE HAS NOT BECOME INFLAMED BECAUSE OF CONCILIATORY NATURE OF SOMARE, WHO, UNDER CONSIDERABLE PRESSURE FROM FRASER DURING VISIT TO PNG, AGREED TO SUSPEND TALKS AND NOT TO DECLARE PNG SEA CLAIMS UNTIL AFTER PNG ELECTIONS. SOMARE IN EFFECT OVERRODE THE VIEWS OF HIS CABINET, WHICH HOLDS A MUCH TOUGHER LINE. CABINET HARD LINE (WHICH HAS NOT BEEN PUBLICIZED) IS TO CLAIM ALL THE CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 PORT M 00371 240211Z

AREA NORHT OF A MEDIAN LINE DRAWN DOWN CENTER OF TORRES STRAIT WITH PNG CLAIMING ALL ISLANDS ON ITS SIDE. TALKS ARE SCHEDULED TO RESUME AFTER PNG ELECTIONSJM IF GOA COMES UP WITH PROPOSALS SIMILAR TO THOSE PRESENTED NOVEMBER, TALKS WILL FAIL AND PNG WILL MAKE UNILATERAL SEA CLAIM IN ACCORDANCE WITH NATIONAL SEAS ACT. ISSUE AS ALREADY INTRODUCED A NOTE OF STRAIN, ACCORDING TO DABB, BUT EFFECT HAS BEEN MODERATED BECAUSE OF PRIME MINISTER SOMARE'S CONCILIATORY NATURE.

PNG COMMITMENT TO EXCLUDE ISSUE FROM ELECTIONS IS BEING UNDERMINED BY PRIVATE AUSTRALIAN GROUPS SUCH AS THE

AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES AND THE FEDERAL COUNCIL FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF ABORIGINES AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS (FCAATSI) WHO ARE PUBLICLY PRESENTING AUSTRALIAN CASE AND INVITING PNG LEADERS TO COME TO AUSTRALIA TO PARTICIPATE IN PUBLIC SEMINARS OR DEBATES TO PRESENT GPNG VIEWS. KIKI HAS REFUSED TWO SUCH INVATIIONS, ONE BY AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES FOR MARCH 18-19, AND ANOTHER FOR APRIL 8-9 BY

FCAATSI. IN REPLYING TO AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL OF CHURCHES, KIKI PRESENTED GENERAL STATEMENT OF PNG POSITION, A PART OF WHICH IS AS FOLLOWS:

QTE: THE PAPUA NEW GUINEA GOVERNMENT IS ABSOLUTELY CONVINCED THAT A PERMANENT RESOLUTION OF TORRES STRAIT ISSUE CALLS FOR ADJUSTMENT OF SOVEREIGNTY TO BE MADE. NO PAPUA NEW GUINEA GOVERNMENT OF FUTURE IS LIKELY EVER TO DEPART FROM THIS POSITION. PRESENT PAPUA NEW GUINEA GOVERNMENT IS DETERMINED TO SEE THAT FAIR AND EQUITABLE SETTLEMENT I REACHED THAT WILL LAY THE QUESTION TO REST FOR ALL TIME AND NOT MERELY BURY IT FOR FEW MONTHS OR YEAR OR TWO. UNLESS THAT POINT IS UNDERSTOOD NO AMOUNT OF PUBLIC DEBATE OR SEMINARS CONVENED BY WELL-INTENTIONED ORGANISATIONS WILL CONTRIBUTE ANYTHING AT ALL TO AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE QUESTION. I DO NOT WISH TO GO INTO THE LEGAL MERITS OF SITUATION EXCEPT TO SAY THAT, IF NECESSARY, THE PAPUA NEW GUINEA GOVERNMENT IS PREPARED TO CONTEST THE MATTER, WITH CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 PORT M 00371 240211Z

EVERY LEGAL MEANS AT ITS DISPOSAL, EVEN IF WE HAVE TO USE SUCH LAWYERS AS WE HAVE AND SPEND MONEY THAT WE CANNOT REALLY AFFORD. END QTE.

IN RELATED

PRESS STATEMENT KIKI INDICATED THAT HE HAD AGREED WITH AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN MINISTER PEACOCK "THAT A PUBLIC ARGUMENT ABOUT TORRES STRAIT WOULD NOT ASSIST IN A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT". HE NOTED THAT PUBLIC AIRING IN AUSTRALIA OF VIEWS OD QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT AND OF SOME TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS WAS PRESENTING A DISTORTED AND ONE-SIDED PICTURE WHICH MIGHT LEAVE IMPRESSION THAT PNG DID NOT HAVE A GOOD CASE. HE FURTHER NOTED THAT HE WAS NOW WONDERING IF IT WAS WISE TO CONTINUE TO MAINTAIN A PATIENT SILENCE. "PERHAPS IT WOULD BE A GOOD IDEA FOR THE GPNG TO CONVENE AN INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR AT PORT HTRESBY ON THE SUBJECT OF WTETHER DEVELOPED COUNTRIES SHOULD BE ABLE TO RELY ON ALLEGED COLONIAL BOUNDARIES AT THE EXPENSE OF NEIGHBORING EEVELOPING COUNTRIES".

3. FUTURE: DABB CONSIDERS SITUATION TO BE POTENTIALLY MOST DAMAGING TO PNG-AASTRALIAN RELATIONS. IF TALKS FAIL AFTER ELECTIONS, PNG WILL DECLARE ITS CLAIMS. POSSIBLE SOLATION IN HIS VIEW FOR AUSTRALIA/PNG TO AGREE WITH SEA AND SEA LINE BOUNDARY WITHOUT DEFINING STATUS OF ISLANDS. SUCH A LINE WOULD NOT, IN HIS VIEW, ALTER QUEENSLAND BORDER, AS DEFINATION THAT BORDER RELATES TO DRY LAND AND NOT SEAS OR CONTINENTAL SHELF BELOW LOW WATER MARK. TO DATE AUSTRALIA HAS DEEN UNWILLING ACCEPT THIS APPROACH. AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMM VIEW THAT OTRRES STRAIT ISSUE HAS NOT AFFERTED BILATERAL RELATIONS APPEARS TT US TO BE HIGHLY OPTIMISTIC9

4. OUR INFORMATION IS BASED LARGELY ON GPNG SOURCES.  
WE WOULD APPREPRIATE HAVING VIEWS OF EMBASSY CANBERRA.  
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## Message Attributes

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**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
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